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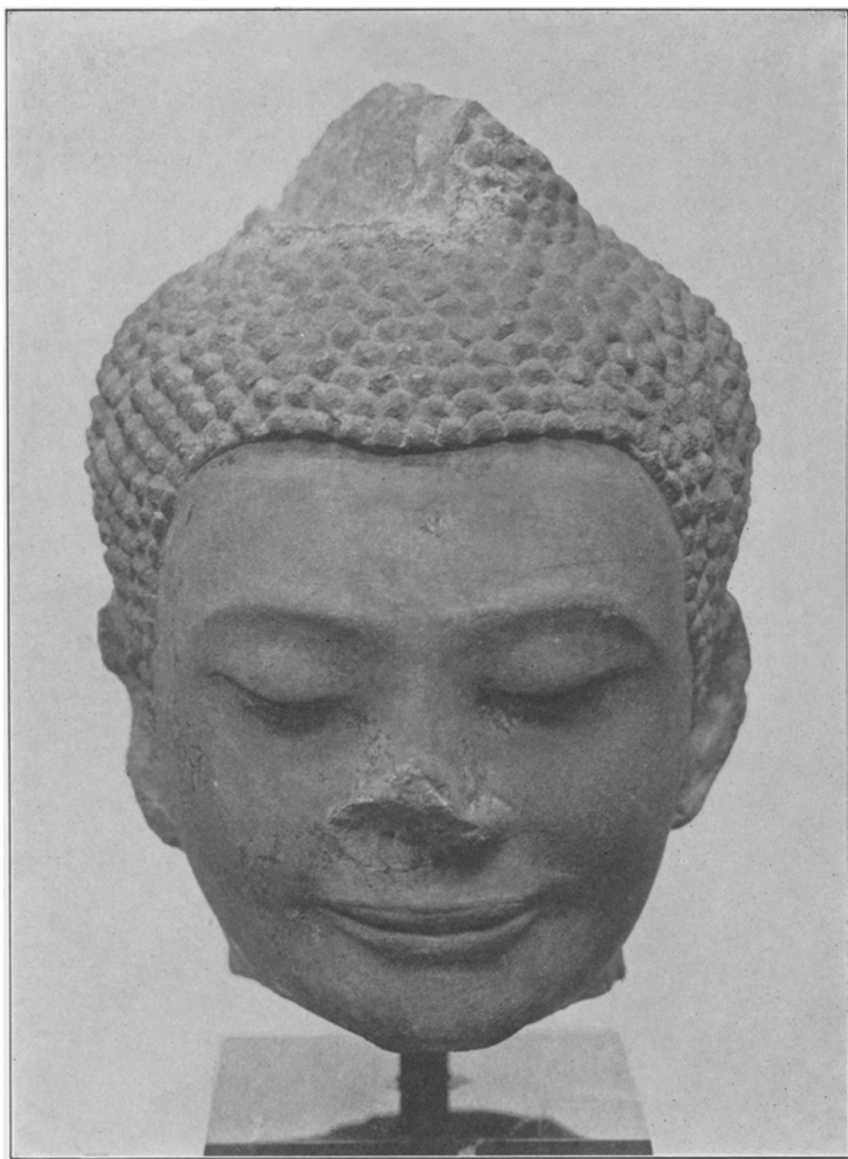
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1. BUDDHA (KHMER). FOGG ART MUSEUM

AN EXAMPLE OF CAMBODIAN SCULPTURE

IN the Art of Sculpture, as it is generally practiced in America and in Europe, the student is introduced, at once, to the human figure and to particular models. The model is studied from different angles and points of view and then reproduced as nearly as possible in a reduced facsimile. When, after some years of this practice of imitation, the student is able to reproduce the model with success he is regarded as a trained artist. That means that he is prepared to express his ideas, if he has any. If, as it often happens, he has no ideas, he is apt to become a teacher. It is so much easier to talk about doing things than to do them. There are others, however, in increasing numbers, who, having imagination, begin the practice of the Art by following its suggestions. They call themselves "independents." Their effort is, first and last, to convert ideas into realities. If what they imagine is interesting or significant, interesting and significant works ought to be produced. As a rule, however, the works produced show a deplorable poverty of ideas and a need of technical knowledge, understanding, and skill. These "independents" are "emancipated," they tell us, not only from the practice of imitation but from tradition and all precedents of the Art. They do their work and express themselves, each one in his own workshop and in the limited light of his own personal experience.

For this reason it rarely happens that we recognise a master or discover a masterpiece.

The living model was used constantly in France during the Eighteenth Century and in Italy during the period of the Renaissance. It was used, however, not as we use it, but in a different way. It was used simply as an aid in the expression of ideas, as a means of getting the visual knowledge required for the production of a particular work, — a certain figure, for example, in a certain attitude, imaginatively conceived. Unlike the modern “independents” the sculptors of the Eighteenth Century and of the Renaissance had a profound respect for tradition and good precedents and were unwilling to exhibit works which were not up to the standard established and maintained in their craft. The artist was self-conscious. His idea was to express himself, always, but in so doing he kept very close to tradition and good precedents. Avoiding eccentricities he did his work as well as he could, keeping it up to a recognised standard and surpassing it if he could. He was, in this way, safeguarded from doing absurd and ridiculous things. As a result of this theory and practice of Art we recognise many masters and many masterpieces.

Going back beyond the Art of the Renaissance, to Gothic, Romanesque, and Byzantine Art we are surprised to find a vast amount of excellent work and many masterpieces but no masters. Why? Because such a high level of excellence was attained by everybody who practiced the Art that it was very difficult for anybody to excel in it. The work

of the master was only a little better than that of the common craftsman. It was not easy to distinguish it. Then it never occurred to anyone that he was expressing himself. He was doing a recognised type of work because it was wanted and he was doing it as well as he could. He was only one of many doing the same thing in the same way. So it was in Ancient Greece, in Egypt, and in Asia everywhere. All that the master was able to do that the ordinary craftsman was unable to do was to add "that little thing which makes perfection, which is not a little thing."

I find the explanation of this very interesting condition of things in the fact that during the Middle Ages, in Ancient Greece, in Egypt, and in Asia, the practice of the craftsman was very strictly determined by tradition and good precedents, by formulas or canons of proportion, and by rules of procedure; rules to be followed by everyone, as a matter of course. The first rude image which was produced became a prototype. It was the one and only. It was the best of its kind because there was only one. It was a symbol; a suggestion of life and an idea of it, and because there was nothing better of its kind it was considered beautiful. It was reproduced as occasion required and improved from time to time; but very little, if at all, changed in its character or in its meaning. The improvement of it was slow but sure. The common craftsman knew exactly what he had to do and exactly how to do it. All that he could expect to do, in any case, was to do the same thing in the same way, only

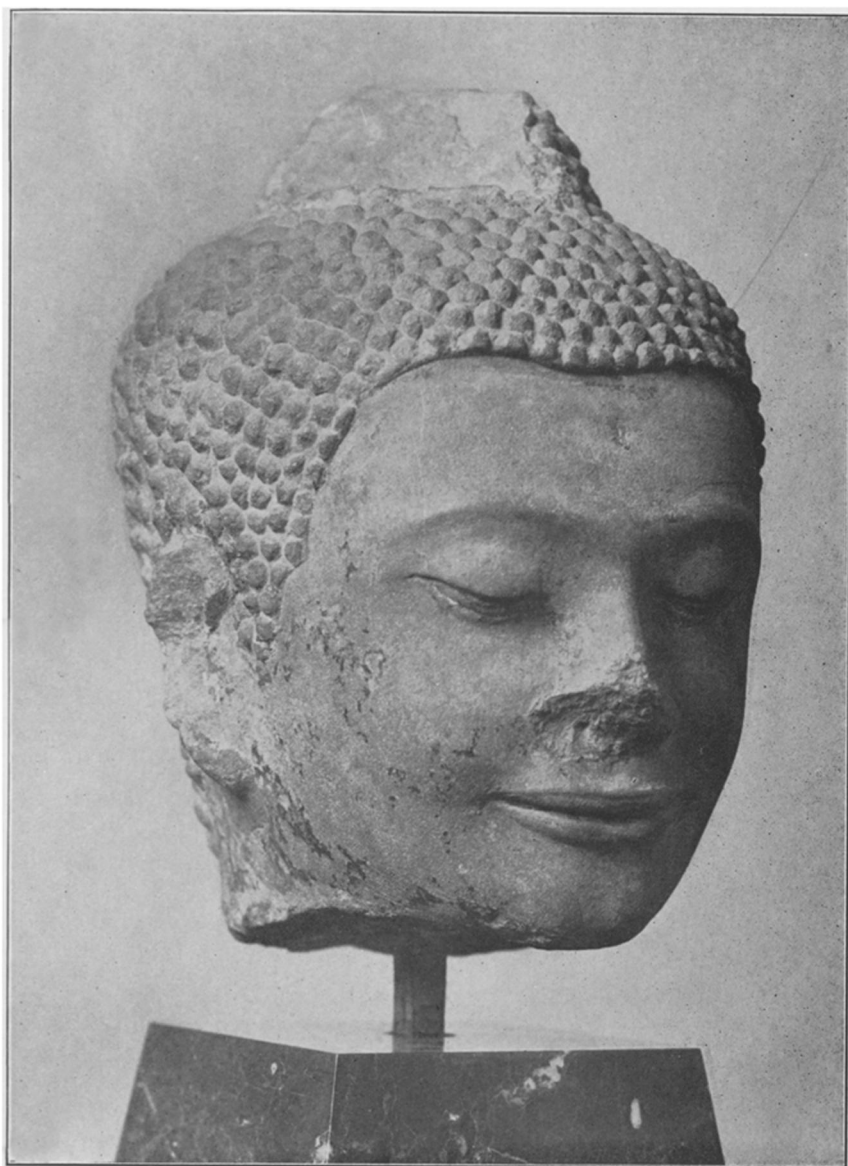
a little better, when that was possible. So, by degrees, the first rude image, without changing its character or meaning, became more and more life-like and expressive. What in the beginning was only a suggestion of Nature and Life became as it went on, a specific description and representation of it. In this way the truth of the imagination as expressed in the work of Art approached the truth of vision and in the ultimate achievement, reached it. This truth of vision was never reached in the beginning but always at the end. It was reached by the effort, not of any particular master, trying to express himself, but by generations of craftsmen; each one following tradition and the best precedents, as a matter of course; adding something more of truth when he was able to imagine it. With this brief explanation of a method and principle of artistic effort and achievement, long abandoned and very little understood, I shall proceed to consider a few examples and illustrations which I find in Cambodian Art; examples which we have at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and at the Fogg Museum of Harvard University.

There are no ruins in the world more wonderful and impressive than those of Cambodia, which have come to our knowledge within quite recent times. Once a populous and, in its way, a civilized country, Cambodia is now, most of it, a jungle for wild elephants, tigers, and serpents. There are only a few people left there and no civilization of any consequence; only ruins, the evidence of the civilization that has passed away. There are ruins here

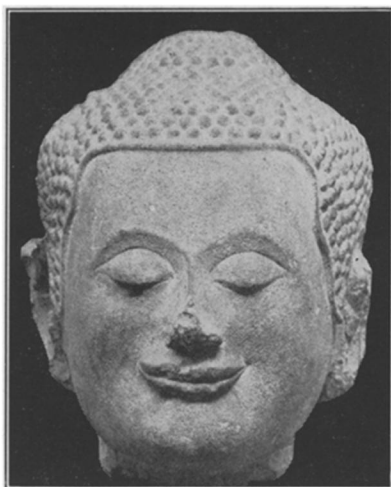
and there, all over the country, but the centre of interest is at Angkor; in the walled city of Angkor Thom and in the temples of Angkor Wat, Ta Prom and Pra Kahn which are outside the walls but not far away. Unfortunately Angkor is difficult of access and only a few travellers have been there. It is accessible only between the months of November and January: before the condition of inundation, at the end of the wet season, has passed, and before the waters of the great lake, Ton-le-sap, have subsided, making navigation impossible. It is by no means easy to get to Angkor and to stay there is never very safe. I believe there is no place under the sun so hot. It is worth while, however, to take the trouble and the risk; for nowhere under the sun are the wonders of Nature and of Art so impressively united.

The civilization which produced the buildings, now in ruins, and the sculptures upon their walls, had its beginning in the ninth century of our era and its ending in the thirteenth. Though there are many ruins and many sculptures there are very few inscriptions or historic records of any kind. We have the names of kings who made gifts to the temples. These gifts were made sometimes to Siva and sometimes to the Buddha. There are references to wars with the Chams, a neighbouring people who occupied the country of Champa, to the north and east of Cambodia. The Art, which is our particular interest, may be described as partly Cambodian (Khmer), partly Cham; partly Buddhistic and partly Saivite.

In the year 1295 an embassy came to Cambodia from the emperor of China to demand tribute. One of the envoys, Tcheon Ta-kouan, stayed for a whole year at Angkor Thom and has written an account of what he saw and learned there. He describes the people and their customs and laws; which he says were rude as compared with those of the Chinese. He speaks of the slaves that were employed in great numbers and of the agriculture that was carried on most productively. He speaks of the Chinese who had come into the country and settled there and were profitably busy. At the end of the account there is a description of the king coming out of his palace in state and showing himself to the people. At the head of the procession was a guard of cavalry, with standards, flags, and music. There were the ministers and princes, some of them mounted on elephants, others in chariots, with footmen carrying red parasols. The women of the palace followed, from three to five hundred of them; some with lighted candles, others carrying utensils of silver. There were, also, dancing girls and women with spears and shields, who were the king's particular body guard. The wives of the king and his concubines were carried in palanquins. The parasols in this case were white with handles and decorations of gold. The king, carrying in his hand a sword of gold, followed on an elephant. There was another guard of cavalry at the end of the procession. During the year of his stay at Angkor Thom Tcheon Ta-kouan saw the king come out of his palace four times. This



2. BUDDHA (KHMER). FOGG ART MUSEUM



3. BUDDHA (KHMER). BOSTON MUSEUM



4. BUDDHA (KHMER). BOSTON MUSEUM



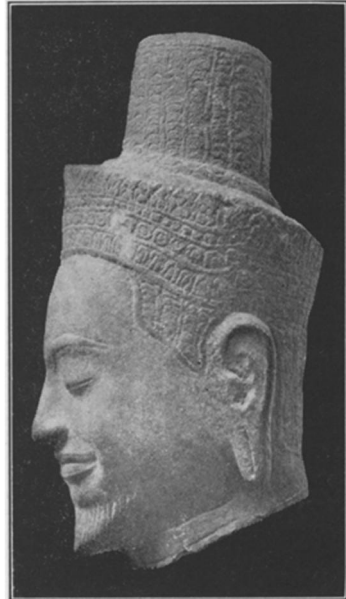
5. BUDDHA (KHMER). BOSTON MUSEUM



6. KHMER? BOSTON MUSEUM



7. CHAM? BOSTON MUSEUM



8. CHAM? BOSTON MUSEUM

account which he has given is wonderfully well illustrated in the sculptures of the Bayon, the great temple of Angkor Thom. Of these sculptures there are now excellent photographs, which may be seen in the library of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The reader is referred particularly to the "Bulletin de l'École Française de l'Extrême Orient," 1902, and to "Le Bayon d'Angkor Thom, Mission Henri Dufour," Leroux, Paris, 1910.

Of the Art, Khmer or Cham, very little has been known until now. During the Siamese occupation of the country everything was disregarded and neglected. There were very few travellers, very few books were written; very few photographs were taken; and almost nothing was published. Now that the country has come under the control of the French, systematic explorations and investigations are being made and a number of scientific men are writing descriptions and producing illustrations. A very large and important collection of casts has been brought to Paris and set up at the Trocadero. Very few of the sculptures, however, have been removed and brought away. There are some pieces, not many, at the Trocadero and others at the Musée Guimet, and the dealers in Paris have a few for sale. Under these circumstances we are fortunate, here at Harvard and in Boston, in the possession of eight or nine. One of them, the head of a Buddha, now on exhibition at the Fogg Museum, in the Sachs Collection, I consider the finest of them all. (See illustrations 1, 2.) The other examples are at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,

in the Ross Collection. (See illustrations 3 to 8.) The head of the Buddha at the Fogg Museum is not only the finest of all these examples but it is the finest that I have seen anywhere, either in Paris or in Cambodia. It represents not only the best of its kind in Khmer sculpture but is, in my judgment, one of the supreme achievements of the Art of Sculpture. As such it may be compared with the Chios head (from Greece, about 450 B.C.) and with the head of Shepseskaf, the son of Mycerinus (from Egypt, about 2800 B.C.); both in the Boston Museum. Comparing the head of the Fogg Museum with these recognised masterpieces it will be appreciated as their equal if not their rival. Comparing it with the Cambodian head in Boston (No. 3) it will be recognised as an example of precisely the same type and formula but far more developed and far more expressive. In it we see an extraordinary likeness to life; almost a portrait; and, more than that, a subtle suggestion and expression of a state of mind and of emotion. The eyes are almost closed, not in sleep but in meditation, and there is a smile upon the lips suggesting a vision of everlasting peace. Here is a work of Art which is descriptively and specifically true to Nature and to Life, and beautiful, because we can think of nothing, of its kind, more nobly conceived or better expressed.

DENMAN W. ROSS